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Classified By: ECOPOL Counselor Michael Meigs for Reason 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (SBU) This is #6 in our current series on politics in the Dominican Republic:

The PRD: It,s Broke. Fix It.

(U) ** Without Hipolito Mejia to hold it together, the venerable populist PRD is not mounting a coordinated response to Leonel Fernandez's PLD administration. We look at the contending personalities and the efforts to heal the wounds -- and identify some potential PRD leaders in the upcoming generation. **

(U) Now in opposition, the Dominican Revolutionary Party is fragmented. Former president Hipolito Mejia shows little interest in the party, and its lesser leaders snipe in the media. Followers of ousted party president Hatuey de Camps continue to squat in the party headquarters, forcing the "legitimate" PRD to meet at another location. There are at least two candidates to head the party, but the political committee on October 19 decided to limit a November 28 convention of delegates to revising the party statutes and postpone an "ordinary convention" (national balloting to elect party officers) until February.

(U) On paper the PRD dominates Congress, with 29 of 32 senators and 72 of 150 representatives. But party discipline has virtually disappeared, leaving the PRD as legislative opposition rudderless.

Senators Refuse to Be Whipped

(U) On September 21 and 23, party leaders Tony Raful and Vicente Sanchez Baret pressed senators to exclude from tax reform legislation an anti-trade protectionist tax favoring sugar interests, directly counter to the free trade agreement signed with the United States and Central American countries just six weeks before. Sanchez Baret,s talk of expelling dissidents from the party angered PRD senators and was taken as a challenge to the leadership of Senate President Andres Bautista (PRD). On a first reading, 14 senators defied Sanchez Baret; on the second, 19 did so.

(C) Apprised the previous day of the threat to the bilateral trade agreement, Mejia had told the Ambassador that with a few days of work he could counter it. He then he left town. That same evening the senators approved the tax package, complete with the offending tax.

What Must Be Done?

(U) The PRD political committee met October 6 to begin organizing a party referendum and convention. As vice-president of the party Mejia made his first public appearance since leaving office, sitting alongside aging former president Salvador Jorge Blanco. He blustered in jocular fashion with the press, as usual, but offered no cure for the party,s disorganization. He disclaimed any interest in seeking the party presidency.

(U) Other PRD figures have called for "renovation" or "restructuring" of the PRD, and some acknowledge mistakes under Mejia,s leadership. But as the Fernandez administration moves smartly to investigate charges of malfeasance, many in the PRD are feeling vulnerable. The party as a whole is on the defensive, complaining that the new administration has failed to respect Mejia appointments to permanent positions, insisting that last-minute pension decisions be respected, and denying that PRD rowdies are contributing to the perceived "crime wave" across the country.

(C) Without Mejia,s rough charisma, his "PPH" faction no

longer has any coherence. Acting PRD president Tony Raful on September 28 expressed doubt to poloff the party could hold its balloting for party officers ("ordinary convention") in November as scheduled. On October 20, the PRD Political Committee announced a decision, to be confirmed, to postpone the party election until February 27; as an innovation, all registered party members -- not just local and provincial leaders -- will be able to vote. A convention of delegates November 28 will be limited to revising the party statutes. PRD vice president Tirso Mejia-Ricart, on the organizing committee, told poloff October 14 that he favored using the November convention to elect new electoral precinct committees,

(U) There is no clear path to reunification. Former VP Ortiz-Bosch reminded the press that the PRD has bounced back before, from equally divisive confrontations in the 1980s between Jose Francisco Pena Gomez and Jacobo Majluta. But many, including Senate vice-president Cesar Matias, refuse to reach out to Hatuey De Camps and his followers, who were expelled in May for openly campaigning alongside the PLD against Mejia,s re-election. To develop options for the future, former vice president Milagros Ortiz-Bosch -- who chairs a committee to organize the convention and modernize the party -- directed that a 40-question referendum of PRD members be held nationwide starting October 16-17, an undertaking that she characterized as a "consultation-self-criticism" on the party's errors and what is to be done.

The Tired, The Discredited, and The Contentious

(C) New faces are needed. Senior leaders are familiar, spent, or beyond stump politics. Ortiz-Bosch was indecisive and then half-hearted in campaigning for Mejia. PRD secretary-general Rafael "Fello" Subervi has a reputation for sleaze, not offset at all by his belated acceptance of the VP slot on Mejia,s ticket. On October 15, Subervi told the press he "does not aspire to a position as a party officer." Former labor minister Milton Ray Guevara, amending the party statutes, is a fine legal scholar and smooth operator, praised for his chairmanship of the ILO annual general meeting in June. But he lacks a wide or deep following in the party.

(C) Other rivals last year for the presidential nomination are regional barons or simply pretenders. These include Senator Ramon Alburquerque of Monte Plata, Jose Rafael Abinader, and Emmanuel Esquea, who has just announced his candidacy for party president -- evidence that perpetual optimism overlooks hard facts.

(SBU) PRD congressional leaders have good reputations within and outside the PRD. Senate president Andres Bautista showed in the tax reform standoff that he will insist on respect, however many years he has supported Mejia and the PPH. Chamber of Deputies president Alfredo Pacheco won re-election without opposition this past August, demonstrating his effectiveness across party lines. Both will have a voice in the party,s revival; neither shows ambition for higher elective office.

(C) That leaves the devil they all know -- Hatuey De Camps, still recognized by his clique as party president. Hatuey met last week with a small faction of friendly PRD senators who think that, with his handsome tiger face and offer of an "olive branch," he can be sold as a figure of principle capable of winning back the presidency in 2008. Mejia-Ricart, another aspirant to be party president, commented privately that Hatuey is no more likely than Mejia to unify or modernize the PRD.

(U) Hatuey assembled his faction on October 9 to announce to the public a plan for PRD reunification. He has strength within provincial party commands across the country. He speaks of holding his own "convention," in disregard of the structures of the mainline PRD.

A New Generation

(SBU) Eventually the PRD will have to hand off to a new generation, but to whom?

- - (SBU) Orlando Jorge Mera, son of President Jorge Blanco (1982-86), served as director of the Dominican Telecommunications Agency (INDOTEL) and coordinator of the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights. He is young, smooth, and English-speaking. But he has yet to leap from the role of competent technocrat to that of politician. His recent op-ed piece on "challenges to the PRD" lapsed into platitudes.

- - (C) Miguel Vargas Maldonado, former minister of public works, is a possibility, but will have to "prove himself innocent" of graft to skeptical Dominican voters.

- - (SBU) Julio Cury, a young and well-spoken hatueycista

attorney, has been prominent recently on television talk shows, expressing indignation about corruption and urging the new administration to "save the party system of democracy" by vigorously prosecuting Mejia administration officials. His may not be a strategy for short-term victory, but in a country tired of corruption he may be building a reputation for the future.

- - (SBU) Senator Alejandro Santos, chairman of the industry, trade, and free zones committee, could be positioned for influence. He also chairs the special committee to examine Fernandez's proposed revocation of the protectionist tax on fructose drinks. Santos was briefly on the Foreign Ministry staff before serving as appointed governor of rural Salcedo province, 2001-2002.

The Short Haul

(SBU) Modernizing the PRD's organization and procedures may be a way to rebuild its strength, currently stuck at the traditional 30 percent of the electorate with a formal membership of 1.2 million. Ortiz-Bosch's committee is discussing a proposal to select party officers by direct vote of members, a sharp turn away from the custom of following a "caudillo" like Mejia or the late Jose Francisco Pena Gomez. Another proposal would be to restructure so that PRD local committees coincide with electoral precincts.

(SBU) The party expects to lose some and perhaps many of its Congressional seats in the 2006 legislative elections. Its comeback strategy will target the next presidential contest in 2008. The longer the PRD takes to reconstruct itself, the more likely it is to stay out of power - - the last time the electorate voted out a PRD presidential candidate, the party remained in opposition for 14 years.

Life without Effective Opposition

(SBU) Meanwhile, the country as a whole suffers from PRD division. Ongoing national crises exert great pressures on society and demand a constructive, coherent opposition. The PRD must prove itself capable of negotiating with the Fernandez administration and finding consensus on approaches to reform, trade, rule of law, and strengthening of institutions. But since losing the election, the PRD has been less than the sum of its increasingly self-interested members.

12. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell, Michael Meigs.

13. (U) This piece and others in our series can be consulted on our classified SIPRNET site <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> along with extensive other material.
HERTELL